DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 154 625 FL 009 471

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TITLE A Comparative Look at the Influence of Buddhism and Communism on the Chinese Language. Interfaces, No. 9, Spring 1978.
SPONS AGENCY Georgetown Univ., Washington, D.C. School of Languages and Linguistics.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 10p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Asian History; *Chinese; Chinese Culture; *Communism; Concept Formation; Diachronic Linguistics; *Intellectual History; Language; Language Variation; Literary History; Non Western Civilization; Philosophy; *Political Influences; Religion; *Religious Factors; Translation
IDENTIFIERS *Buddhism; *China; Indian Culture

ABSTRACT

The nature of the relationship between linguistic expression and thought has been a source of controversy in linguistics and psychology. This relationship should be considered one of mutual influence and subject to change. An example of this interrelationship can be found in the process of alteration and assimilation that Indian Buddhist thought underwent in order to conform to the traditional and distinctive Chinese way of thinking. Differences which caused conflict between the two systems include: (1) the Indian emphasis on the universal and abstract, as opposed to the Chinese fondness for the particular and concrete; (2) Chinese grammatical ambiguity, not found in Indo-European languages; and (3) the importance of negative virtues in Indian thought. Where Indian Buddhist thought came into conflict with Chinese, the Chinese translation accomodated the latter. A broader influence of Indian Buddhism can be seen in the development of Chinese literature, as, for example, in the adoption into Chinese of the Indian habit of mixing verse and prose style. A final example of the relationship between language and thought is the language reform which sought to adapt the Chinese language to modern political ideology, specifically Communist ideology. Where Buddhism failed to change the class-conscious Chinese language, Marxism has eliminated most expressions of hierarchical distinctions in the Chinese language. (AM)

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III. A COMPARATIVE LOOK AT THE INFLUENCE OF BUDDHISM AND COMMUNISM ON THE CHINESE LANGUAGE

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A continuing source of controversy in linguistics and psychology has been the nature of the relationship between linguistic expression and ways of thinking. The general assumption has been that there is an intimate connection between the characteristic thinking of a people and the language they use to express themselves. However, this should not be considered a static relationship, but one of mutual influence subject to change over the course of history.

When Buddhism was first imported into China in the first century A.D., it was a highly developed and sophisticated philosophy that was the product of a people with a very different world-view and system of language than the Chinese. During the following seven hundred years, thousands of volumes of Buddhist writings were translated from Sanskrit into Chinese and by the middle of the fifth century all of China had formally converted to Buddhism. Indian Buddhist thought was not adopted directly by the Chinese, but went through a process of alteration and assimilation to conform to the traditional and distinctive Chinese way of thinking.

H. Nakamura, as well as other scholars (K.S. Ch'en, A.F. Wright), have tended to emphasize the differences between Chinese and Indian Buddhism, indicating that Buddhism in China eventually became a native product, rather than stressing the influence of Buddhism in the development of Chinese language and culture. The following examples illustrate some of the major differences between Chinese and Indian language and thought and how these differences were resolved in the Chinese translations of Buddhist texts.

I. Indian Emphasis on the Universal and Abstract Compared to Chinese Fondness for the Particular and Concrete Expression

The Indian Buddhist philosophy considers universals more important than individuals and sees the self as essentially identical with others. The universal aspects of existence are stressed, rather than the particular, individual distinctions. This trend of Indian thinking is manifested in Sanskrit by the great number of passive sentences used impersonally. Abstract nouns are common in everyday speech in Sanskrit. "He becomes old" is said in Sanskrit: "He goes to oldness." That Indians are at home in abstract speculations is also evident in their skillful expression of the concept of numbers.

In contrast, Chinese concepts tend toward concrete expression. The Chinese language has a preponderance of words expressing bodies and shapes, but few words conveying the idea of change and transformation. Concrete images are used in Chinese to express abstract philosophical ideas. For instance, in Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism, a uniquely Chinese school of Buddhism, the universe is expressed as shan, he, ta-ti, "mountains, rivers and the great earth." A human ego is called ts'ao-yüan i-ti-shui, "a drop of water in the Source." The Ch'an term for wandering monk is yün-shui, "clouds and water," which symbolized the monk's lack of a fixed abode. The equivalent Indian term is parivrajaka, "traveler." This fondness for concrete perception is also evidenced by the Chinese equating of the concept of perfection with yüan, "round," a thought which is not present in the original Indian concept. For example, in Chinese it is said that the heart of a sage is round, and the most perfect doctrine in Buddhism is sometimes called yüan-chiao, the "round doctrine." The wheel symbol in Indian thought represented the perfect doctrine of Buddha, but unlike the static Chinese circle, it contained the idea of motion. Indians considered the absolute as limitless and impossible to be represented by concrete symbols.

II. Some Grammatical Differences

For speakers of Indo-European languages, Chinese appears to have a tendency toward ambiguity. There is no distinction between singular and plural and no fixed simple terms for the expression of verb tense or mood, and no cases. For the Western mind, the distinction between singular and plural is considered vital for logical and mathematical thought. The broad grammatical ambiguity of Chinese has led to great difficulty on the part of the Chinese themselves in understanding Buddhist scriptures. As a result, there have been frequent misinterpretations of important doctrinal passages. To form the plural in Chinese, various devices are used, such as the adding of numerals to nouns or of the word teng which can

also mean "and the like." Niu-teng may mean "oxen" or "oxen and horses and sheep." In translating Sanskrit, Buddhist scholars did allow for the difference between the plural and "and the like." However, their formal distinctions were not picked up in everyday speech.

III. Importance of the Negative

Indians tend to consider negatively expressed virtues as having more power than their positive equivalents; e.g., victory/non-victory (rather than defeat) and violence/non-violence. Nagarjuna (ca. 150-250 A.D.), who is considered to have established Mahāyāna Buddhism, expounded the doctrine of the "Eight Negations'

> "The excellent causal origin of things which is non-destructive, non-productive, non-extinguishable, non-eternal, non-uniform, non-diversified, non-coming and non-going, and causes vain phenomena to cease."

The negative was identified with the absolute or infinite. The Chinese tended to focus on what was knowable by direct perception and generally did not pursue metaphysical speculations. However, the Chinese translated these Indian negative terms, not characteristic of Chinese thinking, and as a result they came to be used in everyday speech, sometimes with no religious reference.For example: wu-wei, "non-active," wu-hsien, "limitless, uninterrupted," wu-hsien ti-yü, "the eighth and last Buddhist Hell where punishment continues uninterrupted," and wu-yu, "non-existent." The Chinese word yu, "exist," also means "(man) has or possesses," thus exemplifying the Chinese tendency to consider even abstract ideas in relation to man.

It has often been noted that Indians lack interest in accurate historical dating. Attention is on the universal essence of things rather than their specific constantly changing manifestations. In contrast, the Chinese stress particular facts and have excelled in compiling objective and detailed histories.

To make up for this lack in Buddhism, the Chinese constructed Buddhist histories, dividing the different Buddhist schools into chronological historical sequence even when there was no factual basis to do this. The travel journals of Chinese Buddhist pilgrims also reflect this interest in the world of phenomena in their detailed and accurate descriptions of the geography, climate, produce and customs of the lands through which they traveled.

Buddhism was revolutionary in China in teaching the equality of mankind without regard to status and class. Early Buddhist teaching states that the master should serve the servant. In Chinese translation this was changed to, "the master has to teach his servant in five ways." This translation served well the Chinese of the privileged and educated classes who were not able to completely accept an idea of equality which was in direct conflict with traditional Chinese esteem for social position and adherence to a hierarchical system of social relationships. Chinese Buddhist monks continued to be under the civil authority of the Emperor, whereas in India the King was, at least in theory, supposed to bow before the lowliest monk.

In regard to sexual ethics, Indian Buddhism was also adjusted in translation to fit Chinese customs. Buddhism prohibits sexual relations with any women except one's wife. Hsüan-tsang, the famous seventh century Buddhist pilgrim and scholar, translated this as, "the man who observes five precepts takes a wife and concubines."

These examples primarily illustrate how Indian Buddhism was translated into typical Chinese linguistic forms and adapted to Chinese ways of thinking. However, the broader influence of Indian Buddhism can clearly be seen in the development of Chinese literature. The Indians were fond of myths and poetry and commonly combined verse and prose in their writing. This mixed prose-verse

form was unknown in China before the introduction of Buddhist literature, but it subsequently became a regular feature of Chinese vernacular fiction and one of its defining characteristics. Concern with the supernatural and the spirit world and the Buddhist themes of Karma and reincarnation were reflected in Chinese short stories. Two of China's most famous novels, the Journey to the West, also called Monkey (Hsi-yu-chi,) and the Dream of the Red Chamber (Hung-lou-meng) begin with creation myths not typical of Chinese writing, but directly reflecting a strong Buddhist influence and Indian love of mythology.

Journey to the West is a fictional account of the monk Hsüan-tsang's journey to India to get the Buddhist scriptures, accompanied by animal helpers endowed with magical powers. In the course of their travels, the pilgrim and his friends engage in riddle contests and public debates. The employment of both these language forms is typical in India, but not in China. Riddles appealed to the Indians' preoccupation with the unknown. Debates were common among various schools of Buddhism and were a philosophical device important in the development of Indian logic, but they never gained the same popularity in China.

Although Buddhism did become thoroughly assimilated into Chinese culture, the few examples given above show some of the specific ways in which it changed Chinese linguistic forms and patterns of thinking.

Immediately after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Communists initiated a comprehensive program of language reform in order to promote ideology, eliminate illiteracy and have a system that could readily be applied to the modern tools of communication. Language change in China had begun in the late nineteenth century with the encroachment of the Western powers. The translation of scientific and technical writing demanded

the creation of many new terms. Moreover, the translation of Western literature affected the language and thinking of Chinese writers. The overthrow of the Ch'ing dynasty in 1911 and the subsequent failure of the government to establish national unity or end foreign aggression powerfully motivated a large group of intellectuals to seek revolutionary changes in the national life. Chinese writers realized that classical Chinese was no longer suited to meet the needs of the new China that was emerging. Therefore, a program of vernacular writing was initiated, based on the dialect of the educated citizens of Peking. The written vernacular that developed became the foundation for Modern Standard Chinese.

The Communists effected a systematic language reform that included the adoption of simplified characters and more basic changes in the language itself with regard to vocabulary, syntactic patterns, semantic structures, and rhetoric. This deliberate manipulation of the language was done to promote the establishment of a political and social system based on the Communist ideology. The fundamental changes that resulted are evident on all linguistic levels, although so far the lexical changes have received the more careful study. The following are just a few examples of vocabulary change illustrating the emergence of new social values and modes of thought.

1. New Philosophical terms--Dialectics

The Communist theory of dialectics was alien to the traditional Chinese way of thinking which stressed harmonious relations and a syncretic approach to reconciling conflict. Dialectics in Chinese is pien cheng fu; like many other new philosophical terms, it is taken from the old vocabulary and given a Marxist interpretation. In discussing political matters, workers and peasants commonly use these new philosophical

expressions which still are unfamiliar to college students in Taiwan. Words that express concepts of conflict, change and struggle foreign to the old Chinese world-view are now used frequently in everyday speech.

In translating abstract philosophical concepts from Communism, the Chinese show the same preference for concrete expressions that they did in translating Indian Buddhism. The term mao tun, "lance and shield", is now used to mean contradiction; the association of the original meaning with the characters has not been lost. Mao tun means contradiction within the theory of contradiction developed by Chairman Mao, but it also has come to be applied to all sorts of conflict, including friction among people.

Another expression coined by Chairman Mao is i fen wei erh, "one divides into two." This means to view something from both good and bad sides and is so commonly used that it might be considered the Chinese popularization of the concept of dialectics.

2. Egalitarian Expressions--Loss of Class and Status Distinctions

In contrast with the failure of the Buddhist egalitarian spirit to significantly influence the Chinese, the adoption of Communist ideology has resulted in the elimination of most expressions making hierarchical distinctions. For example, shang szu, "superior" versus hsia shu, "subordinate" has been dropped. Instead, there are new terms which reflect functions and roles, such as fu jen, "the responsible person." Forms disparaging the working class such as k'u li, "coolie" (literally: "bitter strength") have been dropped. Also, an offically favored egalitarian spirit has caused the disappearance of expressions disparaging

women, minority nationalities, and juniors. For example, nien shao wu chih, "ignorant because of young age", is no longer used.

3. Terms for Personal Relationships

T'ung chih, "comrade", has replaced expressions indicating hierarchical distinctions in personal relationships. A new concept of intimate relationships is indicated by the use of the term ai jen to mean "spouse" where it once meant "lover." Expressions such as chia t'ing, "family", and er nü, "sons and daughters" are used metaphorically to refer to the relationship among people working to construct the new Chinese society.

If space permitted many other examples could be given that illustrate the significant interaction between language and thought in the development of Modern Standard Chinese. A comparison of the influence of Buddhism and Communism on the Chinese language can help reveal the extent of change as well as the characteristic forms of Chinese language and ways of thinking that remain as a continuing tradition.

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